

# SIMA

**2019 Symposium**  
*Carolyn Rose Seminar Room, NMNH*

July 11-12, 2019

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**Session One**  
**Thursday, July 11, 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.**

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## PRESENTERS

Matthew Webb – New York University

*Objects, Collections, Communities: Exploring Indigenous Australian Fiber Basketry at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History*

The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History's Anthropology Collection contains 94 Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander woven fiber baskets, collected between 1853 and 1949. Items like these are of much contemporary interest to their home communities and are connected to recent efforts to revive and reimagine historic production techniques and embedded social-ecological relationships. In this presentation, I explore the provenience, symbolism and materiality of one basket from the NMNH collection (item E1535), disentangling aspects of its braided history and meanings. In doing so, I consider how it has been valued differentially at distinct stages in its social life (e.g. in production, exchange, collection, accession and exhibition), and how these differences might be symptomatic of broader inter-cultural attitudes and processes in distinct historical periods. Additionally, drawing on conversations with Indigenous Australian artists, I offer some brief reflections on the potential role of collaborative collections research for contemporary revitalization projects.

Rose Taylor – University College London

*Weaving Relations - What Chumash Baskets In Museums Can Tell Us About Identity And Status*

This study assesses the colonial influence on Chumash traditional basket weaving practices by focusing on the Ella F. Hubby Chumash basket collection accessioned to the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History between 1920 and 1925. Employing a combination of close looking at the imagery, form and conditions of the baskets, archival research and interviews, I consider multiple perspectives on what it meant for the weavers to produce the baskets and what purpose they served vocationally. For example; as a means of perpetuating notions of identity; applying and continuing traditional cultural and ecological knowledge; as a means of income; and simultaneously considering how the baskets acted as symbols of status for the collectors.

Sarah Tamashiro – University of East Anglia

*Creativity and Continuity: Hawaiian Clothing Collections From the U.S. Exploring Expedition*

The U.S. Exploring Expedition (1838-1842) under the command of Lieutenant Charles Wilkes formally visited the Hawaiian Kingdom between September 1840 and April 1841. Crew members collected 92 ethnological specimens from four of the eight main Hawaiian Islands. The collection included at least 30 pieces of *kapa* (Hawaiian barkcloth) and three samples of homespun. This research project places two smaller collections of clothing materials obtained from Kaua'i and Maui in conversation with each other, interrogating what these objects say about regional clothing making during the first half of the nineteenth-century, the growth of agriculture for export, and the collecting interests of the Wilkes' naturalists.

DISCUSSANTS

CANDACE GREENE (NLMNH, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION)

KELLY MCHUGH (NMAI, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION)

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**Session Two**  
**Thursday, July 11, 10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

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PRESENTERS

Addie McKnight – Indiana University

*Materiality of the Written Word: Tibetan Writing Implements in the SI Anthropology Collection*

Literacy has been valued within Tibetan culture since the dawning of Buddhism in Tibet. Religious books, *pecha*, are revered not only for their spiritual content, but also for their excellent craftsmanship and role within rich monastic traditions. While these books can bridge the space between personal and communal practice, so too can other implements of literacy. By examining personal objects such as seals, inkpots, and pen cases, it is possible to begin understanding the various roles writing and reading have played in Tibetan culture over space and time. Observing the material and stylistic range and condition of similar object 'types' gives hints of individual aesthetics and use. By taking into consideration the methods and motivations of particular collectors – both Tibetan and Western – we can better understand how certain objects find their way into a museum setting. Considering aspects of 'what's missing' from both the assemblages of objects as well as the associated documentation invites a conversation around what is possible to discern when viewing collections, and opens avenues for further explorations.

Matthew Magnini – Harvard University

*Sámi at the Smithsonian: The Importance of Small Museum Collections for Indigenous Communities*

The Sámi collection at the Smithsonian includes approximately 58 objects accessioned between 1876 and 1961. Trickling in over many years through at least ten named collectors, at first glance, the collection appears poorly representative of the Indigenous people who live within the state boundaries of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Challenging this impression, this presentation suggests the latent importance of small museum collections for Indigenous communities. Evaluating Smithsonian objects in conversation with contemporary political visions asserted by Sámi, I establish the potential significances of bringing Smithsonian collections into dialogue with Sámi artisans.

Molli Pauliot – University of Wisconsin-Madison

*Created Today: Changes In Materials As Access To Cultural Resources Are Hindered*

American Indians' cultural adaptation is perpetuated within material objects. Cultures are resolute throughout history as environmental shifts and colonialism occurs around them. This change was constant in Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) history in the 1800s. In 1874 the U.S. government failed for the fifth time to move a resistant band of Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin to Nebraska. Through social, political, familial, geographical, and economic challenges Ho-Chunks subsisted. Oral histories and connections to their ancestral homelands was fundamental to survival within Ho-Chunk indigeneity. Tools, implements, weavings, adornments, and clothing in Smithsonian collections illustrate this material progression.

DISCUSSANTS

ALISON BROWN (UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN)

AMALIA CÓRDOVA (CFCH, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION)

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**Session Three**

**Thursday, July 11, 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.**

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2019 FACULTY FELLOWS

CHRISTOPHER BERK – AUBURN UNIVERSITY

*ON STONE TOOLS AND THE "PREHISTORIC": PRELIMINARY COMMENTS ON TASMANIAN ABORIGINALITY AND THE CIRCULATION OF VALUE AT THE SMITHSONIAN*

AMRITA IBRAHIM – GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

*ONION SKIN, SNARK, OBSOLESCENCE: MATERIALS, RELATIONS, AND MEMORIES IN THE HUMAN STUDIES FILM ARCHIVE*

SABRA THORNER – MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE

*NGA WOKA, WOKA NGANIM / I AM THE LAND AND THE LAND IS ME: EMPLACING THE SMITHSONIAN'S POSSUM SKIN CLOAK*

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**Session Four**  
**Friday, July 12, 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.**

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PRESENTERS

CHRISTOPHER GREEN – UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

RE-GIFTING GIFTS: KANAK CHIEFS, US NAVAL OFFICERS, AND THE SMITHSONIAN

While stationed on the South Pacific island of New Caledonia during WWII, Admiral William Halsey and Major General Alexander Patch received important ceremonial gifts from Indigenous Kanak chiefs. Patch received a ceremonial green-stone axe (*O Kono* or *hache-ostensoir*) from Henri Naisseline, grand chief of Maré. Halsey received an ancestral finial (*flèche faïtière*), though more specific provenance is unknown. Both gifts were subsequently donated to the Smithsonian upon the return of the naval officers to Washington. This presentation considers the reciprocal relations the officers were entered into by receiving the gifts, and how those relations were (or were not) factored into the donation of these object/entities to the museum. By attending to their material qualities, the life-histories of these objects can be discerned, as well as the embodied relations implicated for the gift-giver and gift-receiver. More specifically this project considers the implications and social obligations in receiving a more traditional gift (ceremonial axe) and an unconventional gift (ancestral finial) and the field of relations that these distinct gifts enter the parties into.

LEONIE TREIER – BARD GRADUATE CENTER

AUTHENTICITY THROUGH ALTERATION – AN EXAMINATION OF CATLIN'S "ETHNOGRAPHIC" COLLECTION AT THE NMNH

The Department of Anthropology of the National Museum of Natural History holds a collection of ca. 171 objects collected by the American painter George Catlin (1796-1872). While Catlin and the paintings in his Indian Gallery have been studied extensively, the collection of Native material he amassed has received surprisingly little attention by scholars. This disinterest may pertain to the physical condition of the materials, as well as the fact that several pieces show signs of modification. In this presentation, I trace the alterations Catlin made to one shirt (E386509), in which he both added and subtracted materials to the garment. In doing so, I begin to think through Catlin's role as an artist-collector and the implications of these types of modifications in regards to competing understandings of authenticity (e.g. ethnographic vs. artistic) and how these challenge the objects' status in the NMNH collection.

Elena Adasheva-Klein – Yale University

*The Arctic Suit of Lieut. G.B. Harber*

The Harber collection of clothing items dispersed amongst Siberian objects in the Smithsonian's Department of Anthropology embodies three distinct narratives: that of heroic 19th century Arctic exploration; that of the native's imagined outsider; and that of the Arctic environment and lifeways. Donated to the museum by U.S. Navy officer Giles B. Harber in 1892, the clothing was worn by him during the DeLong Relief Expedition to the Lena Delta in Arctic Siberia in 1882-1884. The "costume," together with photographs depicting Harber in his full Arctic suit, constitute evidence of the individual heroism of moving through and succeeding in the extreme conditions, and may also be seen as commemorative objects in the museum collection. Many of them, originally cataloged as "Yakut," most likely represent a pseudo-indigenous style that was locally produced for foreigners. The attributions of the collection reflect institutional histories and Russian-American academic interactions. The animal furs and skins, sewn together by native hands, evoke the importance of human-animal relations in Arctic socio-ecological systems. The examination of material and stylistic qualities of the objects, accession records, attribution histories, and historical contexts enriches the interpretive potential of the Harber collection.

DISCUSSANTS

CANDACE GREENE (NMNH, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION)

IGOR KRUPNIK (NMNH, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION)

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**Session Five**

**Friday, July 12, 10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

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PRESENTERS

Ava Salzer - University of Leicester

*The Collected and Collective Uncertainty of Museum Things: A Study of Unknownness  
In A Section Of E.W. Nelson's Alaskan Collection*

Between 1877-1881 E.W. Nelson collected a number of objects on a Navy expedition to Alaska. The records for these objects contain uncertainties that stem from their history outside and inside of the SI collections. The primary aim of this study is to answer questions regarding this unknownness. There is evidence to suggest that some objects,

by nature of their materiality and documentation, are more prone to uncertainty and unknownness than others. It is shown that there is a need to better understand the reasons for these qualities and to build a framework against their (quite literally) systematic perpetuation in museum environments.

Christopher W. Smith – University of British Columbia

*In Error And Invisible: Misidentified Nuxalkmc Objects In The James Swan Collection In The National Museum of Natural History (NMNH)*

Museum catalogues contain misinformation that can obfuscate provenance and render ancestral belongings invisible to originating communities. This presentation considers three re-attributed Nuxalkmc objects from the James Swan collection in the NMNH (E74747-0, E74752-0, and E74758-0) that are recorded as originating with other First Nations. Through close inspection of accession records, catalogue cards, community input, and the objects themselves, this research seeks to pinpoint where and how this misinformation entered NMNH's catalogue. By reattributing objects and introducing them to Nuxalkmc community members, new and in-depth conversations were sparked that illuminate important aspects of the lives of the objects themselves. This research will discuss what implications close-looking and reassessing historic documentation might have for museums as well as originating communities in the era of repatriation and community engagement.

Emily Hayflick – Bard Graduate Center

*Stitching Alternative Histories: How Tourist Objects in Museum Collections Reflect Craft and Womanhood*

Tourist objects have routinely been neglected and obscured by professional anthropologists and museum collectors; however, in small numbers, these pieces have made their way into natural history museums. Within the collections of the National Museum of Natural History's Department of Anthropology, there are at least thirteen examples of decorative patchwork bird and mammal pelt objects, produced as tourist or souvenir pieces by Native Alaskan, likely Yup'ik, women. Examining the construction, traces of use, and imagery of these pieces and similar ones at the National Museum of the American Indian, contextualized with accession and archival records, I will explore how these objects display relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous women relating to notions of craft and womanhood across cultures. Following these pieces through their current status as museum objects, I will also discuss the ways in which tourist objects have been repeatedly overlooked and under-recorded through museum practices.

DISCUSSANTS

ALISON BROWN (UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN)

IGOR KRUPNIK (NMNH, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION)